

Peace of Advent

Christmas Feelings: Part 2 “Peace of Advent”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 10, 2023

2nd Sunday of Advent

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-15a ; Mark 1:1-8

Reflection: Psalm 85

Greeting: A voice is crying out: “Clear the Lord’s way in the desert!” “Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!” Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout “Here is your God!”

Prayer: Merciful God, you sent the prophets as your messengers to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to listen to their warnings and to let our lives be changed through your grace. Help us once more to celebrate the nativity, and that we may rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer. Prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas that you stir with your steadfast love and strengthen by your faithfulness that endures forever. May you build us up with feelings of hope, peace, joy, and love as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, from this day forth and forevermore. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 85

Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps. (Psalm 85 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 85 and hear of restoration. That we should call upon the Lord to speak peace to his people. That we find salvation in his love and faithfulness. That we should seek to do good so that we may follow in the path of God’s righteousness. How do you prepare for the peace that we find in Christ? How can you help others to experience the peace of the

Christmas season? What does it mean to be a peaceful presence in a troubled world? How do you prepare your heart and life for the miracle that is Christmas?

Prayer: Lord, prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas this Advent. That we come before you this day experiencing the peace that we find in preparing for the coming of our Savior. May your Holy Spirit guide us from darkness into the light of your love. As we come before you today, we bring to you the joys and concerns that we have spoken aloud together and shared in this place. We come to you silently with the worries and celebrations of our hearts. We pray you will help us to grow in faith through both sorrow and gladness. That through our laughter and our tears you will be with us. May we experience your mercy as you guide us in hope, peace, joy, and love in a celebration of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 40, verses 1 through 11.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers; the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40:1-11 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from 2 Peter chapter 3, verses 8 through 15a.

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. (2 Peter 3:8-15a NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Mark chapter 1, verses 1 through 8.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,' " so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:1-8 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The second Sunday of Advent is all about peace. We look today at the feelings of peace that we have in the Christmas season. Two of our readings mirror each other today, as our Gospel reading directly quotes our reading from Isaiah. Words meant to usher in a sense of peace. It is a peace that we find in God's love and care. A Peace that we discover with repentance. The peace of our hearts that we find in doing the right thing. The peace that Peter wishes upon the listener of his letter. The peace that we feel as part of our Christmas feelings. Peace can be a difficult thing to define. On top of that, we sometimes downplay the peace that we do find in our lives. If it is not something grand and world altering, we can ignore it. We can miss how important that peace is because of how small it may seem. In many ways, Christmas is the reminder of how small things can change the world. How a small and gentle peace can grow to something massive, in the same way that the birth of a child born and laid in a manger can change the course of human history.

When we begin to look at peace, we can take a look at our reading from 2 Peter. That understanding God's time versus our time can be a difficult endeavor. We may want things to happen at a certain time that we think is the right time. We may think things should move quickly, but what is quick for us may not be quick for God. We may not understand the timing that comes with what happens by God's hand. But God is the one who knows when the time is right and when things need to happen. Because God sees the big picture, bigger than we can comprehend. So, Paul encourages his listeners that instead of just waiting and worrying, they should strive to be found at peace. I think about that as part of Advent because Advent is all about learning how to wait. Both the waiting for the celebration of the miracle that is Christmas, and the acknowledgement of our patiently waiting for Christ to come again. Some people are simply terrible at waiting, especially for the coming of the Lord. They see everything in life as a sign that it is going to be tomorrow. And when it isn't tomorrow, they panic and declare it is tomorrow instead. That everything is a sign because what is happening in their life is always a sign of Christ coming again. My problem with that is that it's hard to be at peace when you're

constantly searching with anxiety about the future. It is hard to be at peace when you do nothing but worry and try to usher in the second coming. Because when we do that it's easy to lose sight of the first coming of Christ, the birth that signals our Christmas miracle. Because that peace of mind comes with doing the right thing, with turning away from the things that cause us to go astray and by trying to be the best people we can be with God's care. This is not always an easy thing. You may feel lost. You may feel directionless. Part of the peace that we strive for in waiting is letting go of the need to know everything. That we may not know what's coming or when, but we have peace from knowing that we have done what we could. That we did our best, and that we can let that be enough.

That's the message that we hear when Isaiah is quoted in Mark. Because in Mark Isaiah is quoted to speak of John the Baptist, the messenger who prepares the way. John's role is to be the one who cries out declaring that we should prepare a straight path for God to lead people to righteousness. John is calling for repentance. And that can be a term that we can get lost in. It can be a stumbling block if we get too many ideas caught up in what it means to repent. The easiest way I would describe it is realizing what you are doing wrong and instead you try to change to do what is right. It might sound simple, but that simplicity can help us to realize what it really means to repent. That we turn our hearts and our lives to God so we can do what is right. When we call upon God to help us with that, we find that our hearts find peace. Peace because we no longer have that conflict thinking about what we could have done differently. We have the peace of knowing we did what we could, and it gives us rest. We see people flocking to John to be baptized, to seek this path of repentance. This path that brings people into God's peace. They have peace with each other and peace internally. John becomes this figure telling people to prepare because there is more to come. John is out there living off the land. He is dressed in a way that invokes the image of the prophet Elijah speaking a message of salvation. He baptizes with water, yet one is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And John is in essence crying out that people should prepare for the coming of Christ. And it's the message that we have during Advent. Prepare for the coming of the Lord. Let peace be with you as you turn your heart once again to focus on Christ.

If we turn to the part of Isaiah that Mark is quoting, we can see that Isaiah is speaking of exile and the return home. He speaks of the peace that comes from being back where you belong. But it also means there's the peace of knowing where you belong. So, they call for a straight path for God to be made, that the people can go straight back home to find that peace and find it together with God. Because they recognize the error of their way, and they want to turn back to God. They want to discover the peace that comes from the safety they find with God. They are called to get up to a high place, to the mountain top to cry out "Here is your God!" That this is home. That this is where peace can be found. I note all of this because I think it is all too easy for us to miss why we prepare during Advent. Part of that is preparing to understand where it is we belong. We prepare to understand the miracle of Christmas. That a very small event can signal a very big change. That we often think that if an event is not giant

that it cannot have any real impact. But then I'm reminded that Christmas is about a child born to rather unassuming parents. Born in a simple home and not any kind of palace. Born with lowly shepherds marking the event. A child who grows up as just another child in Nazareth of Galilee. That John is just the voice of one man crying out in the wilderness. Yet people heard and people came. Not because John was flashy. Not because he was an eloquent speaker. Not that he was anything special to look at. Not because he spoke in poetry beautiful enough to be recorded for all to know. John spoke the truth, earnestly and frankly. And John speaking the truth in this way gives us something that we can admire and strive for. John takes up this idea of being one who cries out for people to turn to God. He starts as one man with one message, to repent. He is baptizing so that people can turn their hearts and their lives to God and prepare for the one who will come to baptize by the Holy Spirit. His simple message is to do what is right because Christ is coming. Love your neighbor and love God because Christ is on his way. And I feel like that should be our message during Advent. Discover peace in your hearts and know that God is with us, our Emmanuel. Know peace because God is with you to help you to do the right thing. Share peace because you have the confidence of knowing that Christ is there to strengthen you. That we are always able to rely upon the fact that we are never alone because we have our Emmanuel, God with us. We never need to be afraid if we keep that knowledge in our hearts. That we have the peace of not having to worry. The peace that comes from knowing there is more to life than just what happens today. That we know there is love and there is grace in our Lord. That we know there is always more because we know the miracle of that is God with us.

And so, in this season of preparation I want to encourage you to think about what brings peace to your heart. What is it about Christmas that brings peace to you? What Christmas feelings dwell within you that stir up peace? Is it watching your favorite Christmas movies? Singing your favorite Christmas carols? Baking your favorite Christmas treats? Spending time with loved ones, thankful for the time that we have together? Knowing that through all of these things we may celebrate our Emmanuel, our God with us. With us to bring us peace. With us to bring us hope. That the miracle of Christmas lives in our hearts all year round. Because we live in that miracle each and every day. Because the miracle is that Christ is with us. Christ is with us indeed. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Christmas Feelings

Our Advent and Christmas series is called "Christmas Feelings." We will be looking at the feelings we have from Advent, Christmas, New Year's Day, and Epiphany. Each week takes on a different feeling and how we carry them with us as we look forward to another year with Christ. Let's celebrate our Christmas feelings!

12/3: Hope of Advent	12/10: Peace of Advent	12/17: Joy of Advent
12/24: Love of Advent	12/24: Celebration of Christmas	
12:31: Old and New Year	1/7: Gift of Christmas	

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Calvin St. Michael	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams		

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